



Youth training project gets reprieve

Ministry waited until the last minute, but came through for innovative plan

Clearing the decks before a summer break...

They found the money:

The life expectancy of that ambitious plan to convert the old Taj Mahal restaurant into a training centre for street youth was being measured in days this week, thanks to the Ministry of Children and Families' enthusiastically non-committal response to the task.

But yesterday the ministry came through.

Some committed Victorians have spent a long time working on this innovative idea. On paper, it looks like a winner. It touches all kinds of bases: Responding to the labour shortage, housing homeless kids, training youth for jobs and filling a social gap.

Even more importantly, it's got some good people working on the ground to make it happen, including the indefatigable city councillor Helen Hughes.

Briefly, the backers want to turn the old bed-and-breakfast into a hospitality training centre for street kids and students in the school system who are at risk of dropping out. There are enough rooms to house about 10 people at a time and the facility could turn out (and potentially save) up to 80 youths a year, aged 15 to 22.

The city was on board. The United Way was on board. The Youth Empowerment Society, some private backers and the hospitality industry were on board. Two other ministries of the B.C. government were on board.

But funding was also needed from the Ministry of Children and Families. The local regional office was encouraging, but tapped out. The proposal passed a number of earlier deadlines and was within days of dying.

Some feared that Minister Tom Christensen, having turned down an earlier plea for more money from the Mary

Manning Centre, might be reluctant to turn around and say yes to this project.

The ministry had hinted at shuffling some allocations around, but to their credit, the backers insisted on new money: They didn't want to take money from other service agencies.

And yesterday, they got the good news. The ministry is onside.

Follow the money: All the facts aren't in, so I pass no judgment on the case of Ron and Joan Danderfer, the husband-and-wife senior bureaucrats who were suspended while the circumstances of a \$10,000 cheque to Joan Danderfer from a medical information technology consultant are investigated.

But the case reported by CTV News last week has the lucrative IT world in a tizzy.

The doctor who wrote the cheque — Jonathan Burns — is an information-technology wizard with his own company, used often by the Ministry of Health on e-health projects. He sits on the same e-health steering committee that Ron Danderfer is on.

The ministry has outsourced IT functions to various firms through mega-contracts that are worth hundreds of millions of dollars.

Ron Danderfer was very close to retirement when the suspension was announced. His successor had already been named.

The firms that get the big IT contracts often subcontract other firms to do parts of the work.

And a number of former government officials are now employed as consultants, helping make all these deals work. That makes for a lot of people involved in a lot of major contracts, all of them anxiously wondering where this is going.

The Danderfer case could go nowhere. But if it goes somewhere, it could go anywhere.

It was more than money: Herb Doman's death this week was a remarkably symbolic event.

He was much more than just another millionaire, he was a shining, Island-raised icon of the coastal forest industry



LES LEYNE



Campbell: Questionable tunesmith.

when it was in its prime.

At his peak, Doman employed thousands of people, paying them top dollar as he turned his little Duncan company into one of the big players. Then it all turned to dust. He died at a time when the industry is at or near an all-time low, at the outset of what will be a long debilitating strike, waiting for the government's last attempt to rescue it from oblivion.

The parallels between his career and the industry are too obvious to mention.

Just So You Know: Here are the lyrics to the country-and-western song Premier Gordon Campbell sang at a photo-op organized by the Merritt Mountain Music Festival this week.

He was inducted in the hall of fame there, but members have to be singers. So to qualify, he had to sing a song.

Here's what he came up with:
*You do the dinner,
 And I'll do the dishes,
 Cos' the dinner's so delicious,
 I'm so happy you're my mistress.
 And baby-baby, baby-baby,
 Baby, baby baby, baby, babeeee,
 I love you, I love you, I love you,
 Yes I do.*

Here's hoping it does better than his last musical venture. That was *I'm the Tax Man, Call Me Glen*, which he crooned while wearing a plaid shirt through the 1996 election campaign. Which he lost.

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